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Abstract

This report is based on more than 900 interviews with faculty members, administrators, students, and department chairmen at 19 colleges and universities across the US. The interviews, designed to examine the processes of governance in different campus environments, revealed 4 aspects of presidential style which are discussed within and across institutional lines: how and with whcm the president consults and how he delegates; the channels of informaticn and decision-making thrcugh which he operates; the people on whom he becomes dependent, and why; and the matters which he makes public and those which he keeps confidential. A look at the range of presidential approaches to governance, throcugh democratic, autocratic, hierarchical, or participative structures (or through a combination of any 2 cf these), leads to the ccnclusion that institutional structure is less important in explaining differences in the ability cf presidents to energize the system than are the PEOPLE who comprise the system. Successful presidents are able to estimate what responsibilities the individuals comprising the system are willing to take on, and push organizaticnal levers in such a way that people actually become involved. The author suggests a radical redefinitien of governance, cne that is based less on decision-making, systems analysis and task orientations and mcre on the quality of participation. (WM)

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The President and Campus Governance: A Research Profile [1.]

"It is maybe due to the person at the head, but also to history"

Introduction

The above comment was made by a faculty member being interviewed as part of the AAHE Campus Governance Project. The interview phase of the project consists of over 900 interviews with faculty, students, administrators and department chairmen on 19 college and university campuses across the nation. Based on nominations of those who were knowledgable and influential on campus, the interview was designed to explore how the knowledge and influence processes worked in different individuals and in different campus environments.

It is hardly surprising that the president is usually (with a few striking exceptions) seen as being at or near the center of power, knowledge and influence. But presidents are hardly alike in personality and background, and they certainly function in differing environments. Thus, we cannot just be concerned with the background of the president, nor with the history or "press" of the institution, but, as our quotation above suggests, with the interaction of person and organization.[2.] Four aspects of presidential style have become visible through an intensive perusal of the interview data, and these will provide the framework for this essay. They are:

1. How the president consults, and with whom, and how he delegates.
2. The channels of information and decision-making through which he operates.
3. The people on whom he becomes dependent, and why.
4. The matters which he makes public, and those which he keeps confidential.

We will look first at some sketches of how these processes operate in various campus in the study, then go to more generalized discussion across institutional lines.

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Benevolent Autocracy -- "The President is like a father to us in a good way"

The quotation which begins this section comes from a faculty member at an institution in which a great deal of energy is beginning to be released: "The present governance of (institution) is a benevolent dictatorship for modernization." Although the hierarchical structure remains, people are beginning to contribute more, at their own level in the hierarchy. Most people seem to accept the hierarchy: "Our president has been the driving force...He is authoritarian and has to be. If he turned this place into a democracy, it would fall apart." On this campus, most interviews reveal a need for some hierarchy, some control system -- as Robert Frost put it, "Freedom is working easy in harness." Although the framework appears autocratic, there is much evidence of collaboration and delegation, structured by the president. The faculty senate, an advisory body, was forced into existence by the president, who felt the need for a responsible faculty body with whom he could consult. But the president's style of consultation is such that through it, the whole system becomes energized: "He has tremendous capability, and with extremely little overt action controls the thought and direction of the group. They come away thinking they did it themselves, and they did, but (president) set the framework." In this setting, delegation and consultation are carefully controlled by the president, boundaries are clearly drawn, communication is "through channels," and most people feel that they are in a productive setting. (Another faculty and/or student body might be highly disturbed by the fact that this president "sets the framework," but a subjective judgment would show that on this campus, with these people, the president is maximising the energy level within the institution.)

Insulated Autocracy

For contrast, we can look at another institution with a president and structure which could be called autocractic-hierarchical in which the same dynamism does not exist. The president has power, but he does not use it to get others involved.

A crucial distinction is that in this institution, consultation is ad hoc and confidential: "The president informally consults with (faculty member) about just about everything, although people rarely know this. Also with (administrator); if a decision is made and (administrator) doesn't like it then the decision won't get made." In the first institution the president used his consultation style to get people involved even though he sets the limits; in this case, by keeping his consultations secret, the president makes sure that no one else can get involved. The president of this institution also seems to encourage "going around end," which means a lack of support for the hierarchy: "To get things done you must go to the president. Since the dean has to go to the president, it's a shorter cut to go to the president directly." But the price paid in this system is lack of reliable information as to what is going on -- as one department chairman put it, "Only time I know a person's been hired is when he shows up." As one might expect, many interviews report the existence of a highly organized rumor mill on this campus, as the formal communication system is not doing its job, being thwarted by the president's style of consultation.

A minor variation of this approach to presidential style is the "autocratic-by-default" approach of one president who seems to be the only person in his institution who wants to make decisions -- "The president is warm and open but retreats to his own sanctuary for decision making...rarely invites you to help him or to participate in the decision making process...He becomes surrounded by passive deans who welcome the relegation of decision making to the president." Here again, the president does not seem to know how to use the techniques of consultation and delegation to increase the energy level in the system. One respondent put it succinctly -- "He insists upon keeping his power but doesn't know how to use it."

Autocratic -- "Great Expectations"

In another institution, experiencing enormously rapid growth, and a sharp revision of their aspirations, the president seems to be working to lower the energy level, perhaps fearing a "critical mass" or flash point at which things might blow up. Yet although the institution has changed drastically in size, he has refused to alter the administrative structure through delegation and skillful use of consultation. The paradox was put nicely: "The major responsibility of the staff is to build a great university. We are trying to be a good university en route." Thus the president sees immediate problems in the context of what they will do for or against his dreams of future greatness, while those who will not be present when greatness arrives have a more direct and immediate view of the problem. By refusing to delegate, particularly to the faculty, the president has acquired what might be termed the omnicompetence syndrome -- "The president is in an impossible situation. He spreads himself far too thin by attempting to be personally knowledgable about everything." Because committees tend to be more concerned with immediate problems and solutions, the president goes around them -- "Problems have been handled through sieves of informal communication via those who had the president's ear. Various committees are making decisions while informal communications to and from the president contain information which is not used in the decision-making within the committees." Perhaps the greatest conflict at this institution is in the time dimension -- the president's dream of future greatness conflicts with the immediate needs of those who cannot share in the benefits of that dream.

Delegation -- Active

Unlike these four institutions, there are some in our sample in which presidents are trying to maximize the energy in the institution through delegation of power and authority. At least one president really believes in delegating power

to create a decentralized leadership structure: "I have delegated out of my office responsibilities for the daily workings of the office...Very little routine here... All decisions, or almost all, are made before they reach me. I try to take time, to resolve conflict, try to get conversations going...Decentralization of decision making and routine has resulted in conflict at lower levels. If it persists, I resolve it eventually. We feel free to move around; tend not to be bound by channels and communication pathways." As in our first institution, this president has worked hard to create a faculty senate, but this president wants it to be a decision making body, with students sitting on this and all other campus committees. Many individuals do not seem ready for the speed with which the president has made them responsible -- a student said, "The administration is very much interested in having students make academic decisions. In the past two years we have had some people interested in student government, but they can't get anything done. The things that go on in Student Senate are forensic and not relevant." Some faculty indicate that students are perhaps more effective in moving the faculty than they are other students -- "In the Faculty Senate there is some responsiveness. We have a great deal of freedom and are just beginning to exercise it. Change has come about only with pressure from students, almost by whim.

Unlike the gradualist approach of our first institution, there seems to be a lag in this institution between the time the president dumped responsibility on faculty and students and the time when they were able to learn the new roles that had to be played. Some are still fearful of the amount of power given to the faculty -- "The Faculty Senate is becoming more powerful, the president less powerful. I see this as a dangerous thing. As we become more decentralized in terms of the president's influence, we are in danger of becoming more centralized under the Faculty Senate." Should this respondent be right, it is unclear whether the president would be able to restore the balance if the faculty becomes autocratic. At the moment, he seems to be working effectively through inventing new structures when needed,

consulting in an open and productive way, and delegating genuine power in the form of accountability.

Delegation -- Passive

Another institution provides a fascinating parallel, as the president has done almost precisely the same thing, but without the energy release which is slowly occurring at the above campus. Here the individuals who compose the system are finding more ambiguity than they can tolerate -- "The structure needs more specific job descriptions, more designation of responsibilities. No one follows through; the system has been established but it doesn't result in action. Problems are recognized but sometimes everyone's responsibility becomes no one's responsibility." There is certainly a loss of efficiency implicit in this comment -- "There is a wonderful dependence of the president upon his subordinates, but these persons are inexperienced." As in the above case, some people are upset with the president just because he <u>did</u> make them accountable for their own decisions. On this campus, it may be that the president will have to structure things a bit before the energy increase can be seen.

Delegation by Default

The final institutional sketch exists at the extreme of presidential permissiveness. A succession of weak presidents has created a power vacuumn on campus. In this case, the president does not delegate power, as there is little to delegate. In this situation, which has some attributes of anarchy and some of democracy, there is little trust. A five cent hypothesis would be that no structure, no matter how participative it looked, could work to free the energy within the system without a fair degree of interpersonal trust. Here are some comments -- "When administration doesn't make decisions some minor functionary steps into the pwer gap" -- "Power belongs to those who assert it" -- "Much too much comes to the president too early;

no backstopping at all. The president's image gets tarnished too fast." This president clearly inherited a situation which was virtually impossible -- there was no tradition of presidential authority, power, or responsibility for the institution. Therefore, to be asked to consult with the president was often seen as a waste of time rather than as an honor -- "He is an 'open door' president, but few come in." The present incumbent, however, seems to be trying to reinstate the power of the office of president by establishing close ties with state level authorities rather than the on-campus factions. Under the circumstances, it may turn out to be an effective strategy, as trust was so low among on-campus groups that any useful collaboration, initiated by the president, was most unlikely.

Review

From this look at the interview data on an institutional basis, certain things can be said. First, although "leadership" is extremely hard to define operationally, the democratic-autocratic conception seems to be much too simplistic. A tall, hierarchical structure can still be operated in a very open way, and a flat, participative structure can be full of mistrust and personal antagonisms. Structures are probably less important in explaining differences in the ability of presidents to energize the system than are the people who comprise the system. One might inject the concept of "institutional readiness" here -- like the skilled teacher of reading, a president must be able to gauge the readiness of the participants to become personally accountable, to develop along certain lines. In his ability to estimate what others are willing to take on, a good president and a good teacher have much in common.

We have seen at least one institution in which the president, acting out of a tradition of authoritarianism, is able to use that package of expectations effectively to diffuse an awareness of responsibility out over wide levels of the institution. At times, it seems almost as if a critical mass were reached, and new sources and types

of creative energy are released. But then we must ask the next question -- what will this president leave for his successor? It is much too early to say with certainty, but it may be that when a centralized power source like the presidency is delegated away, the next phase in the institution will be the evolution of a new centralized power source elsewhere within the institution. There are already in the country several faculty senates which take the position that they alone represent the institution (or that they are the institution). This attitude of omnicompetence is precisely that of administrators of several decades ago. Some faculty and student groups, fearful of the power of centralized administrative authority, are in real danger of setting up autocracies of their own which may be no more benevolent than those of administrators. The voluntary giving up of newly acquired centralized power does not seem to be consistent with human history.

Let us now look at some specific dimensions of presidential activity, not through institutional sketches but through the overall problems with which presidents must deal, keeping in mind the goal of maximizing the energy within the institution to accomplish the purposes of the institution.

Consultation and "Channels"

If a president wants change, and most seem to, one vital decision involves the choice between tearing down the existing power and decision-making structure by setting up an ad hoc consultation system and acting on their recommendations, or whether he wishes to upgrade and strengthen the present structure by reinforcing, pressuring, cajoling, and threatening it. Unless he is prepared to stay through the disagreeable consequences of the former course (and some presidents have short but brilliant careers), the second option is often quite effective, on the grounds that a good president is good to the degree that he can maximize the potential energy within the institution as a whole. Often, the president can use informal consultation to plug gaps in the formal structure and make it work more effectively, as in the case

of a president who found a new area in which no formal structure existed: "(President) was very open and supportive from the outset. He suggested that we set up a liason committee which might meet informally with him. (President), during our conversations, would take down notes, and we could see that he was taking action on our requests." In this case, a new formal structure was evolved by the faculty with the president's support.

Unauthorised Consultation

Another interesting dimension of the channels areas is the fact that almost all of our sample institutions have some sort of regular meeting of the chief administrative officers as a staff or team. These groups make a great many important decisions yet the membership and procedures of these meetings is seldom if ever codified. In addition to decision making, these administrative staff meetings serve a very vital communication function, allowing administrators to become informed about activities in each other's areas of responsibility. In this way, "boundary maintenance" is established, whereby the administrative staff can manipulate information distribution outside the select circle, while distributing information freely within the circle. There are similar faculty groups, meeting without any authorization, for the purpose of passing on information within the circle. (Departmental chairmen often spend much time at this.) Thus, they can prevent information transfer to administrative groups just as the administrative staff can act as an information valve for faculty. These groups are often based on personal friendships, not positions, and often exclude others who have valid reasons to get the information. Every oligarchy in whatever place in the campus, contains this boundary maintenance system of information transfer.

The one difference seems to be that the administrative groups make large numbers of very important decisions in their staff councils, while the faculty groups may talk policy or strategy but seldom have the ability to act unilaterally. In state

institutions, this informal administrative group represents the only contact of the institution with the state department of education: "The essential decisions are political, not educational. A sub-group of the Cabinet meets constantly and makes most of the real decisions. ...This group and its members handle almost all formal contacts with (state education department). Academics are excluded; their interests are too narrow and parochial. (Academic) just doesn't understand budgetary considerations. ...(Administrators) control hidden discretionary monies, usually equal to half the department budget. These monies can be and are spent in areas other than where they were originally budgeted." In an otherwise check and balance governance procedure, this group has no legal or visible existence, reports to no one in particular, and thus has an immunity from the rest of the system. In that their decisions may not float up to the level of institutional consciousness for many months, the administrative council may develop a rather optimistic view as to their power. (One administrator reported, "We've been getting away with this for so long it's become a habit.") Administrators engaged in avoiding channels reminds one of comments about the police engaging in violence -- if those who are entrusted to do the right thing do not, who will protect the rest of us?

Consultation from Weakness -- The Business Manager

One of the primary reasons for consultation, of course, is that of getting information from an expert in an area in which the leader is not expert himself. Although the presidential recruitment base may have shifted somewhat since Russell wrote the following remark, the assessment probably remains valid:

> College presidents have been selected chiefly from two lines of activity, the ministry and college teaching. In neither of these two callings is responsibility for the management of large sums of money a prominent feature. In fact, it is safe to assume that a majority of inexperienced college presidents have never, prior to assuming the office, had the responsibility of managing a sum of money much larger than their (usually small) annual salary or, at most, larger than the limited annual budget of a local church.3.

In fact, at the time of Russell's writing, half of the institutions he investigated had a dual system of governance, with the president and business manager as equals, both reporting independently to the board. What could be greater evidence of the president's weakness in finance than for the board to insist on appointing "one of their own," a financial officer with equal power to that of the president's? (The problems of this approach are, of course, horrendous, and the dual system seems to have largely disappeared.) But the president must speak with authority about matters fiscal, even though the business manager now works for him. Thus the dependency of president on business manager is greater today than in the early pattern in which the business manager was considered the authority on money, and the president could work on academic matters.

Our interview data tends to support the notion that one of the president's major dependencies is on the business manager:

> President thinks he is a good fiscal man and describes himself as such, but is not, Dean and Business Manager draw up budget.
>
> President is afraid to approach business manager on some issues.
>
> President says he knows little about business and finance but has not sought advice and has ignored it when given.
>
> President has not specified the limits of business manager's authority, his job responsibilities.
>
> We have to hire people to check on the business office.
>
> The person who receives the most authority but has the least understanding is the business manager. The president is the only one who can help, but he feels he must support the business manager.
>
> The business manager is vital to the president because of all the procedures that must be follower for the state.
>
> President leans on (business manager) heavily because he is shrewder and more sophisticated in finance than the president himself.

Nine of our campuses report this sort of dependency of the president on the business manager. (Although we have no data on this, a hypothesis might be that business man-managers stay in their job longer than presidents, and therefore have a crucial advan-

tage in knowing the institution and its procedures better than the president. Although presidents probably worry about academic irresponsibility, it is almost impossible to define or detect unless the students riot, whereas financial irresponsibility is easy to detect, particularly by board members with business skills. Thus the dependency is imperative for the president's future.

Many faculty seem to feel that financial officers are actually making academic decisions:

> "State policy doesn't permit" is a frequently heard answer from the Business Office; largely it's (Business Manager's) interpretation of state policy.
>
> Academics are excluded; their interests are too narrow and parochial.
>
> You ask (business manager) for something and he says I can do nothing for you.
>
> Every time I try to implement (a program) I'm told there is no money in the budget.
>
> Hell of a time with the business manager -- arbitrary...going into areas and making arbitrary decisions.
>
> Business office has been a bottleneck. We have money budgeted, but it's almost impossible to get the orders processed.
>
> If there's anything hidden on this campus, it's in the service area (Student Personnel and Business).
>
> Business manager, in some ways, controls the academic program.
>
> I know the president means it when he says there's no money, but even when there isn't any money pushing can produce some.

Machiavelli would argue that consultation from strength can be a highly visible process, as one is allowed to demonstrate one's strength, while consultation from weakness should be done in as private a way as possible, so that one's weaknesses will not be made public. Our data tends to support this notion, as there is no record of a system of consultation between president and business manager which is visible to others. The process is non-codified, and seems to take place behind closed doors. One can only speculate on the business manager's awareness of this presidential dependency,

but the degree to which some business managers do make academic policy by the declaration of lack of funds suggests that they often are aware that the president's dependency gives them a wider sphere of operation than just the bookkeeping function. Thus, these consultations seem to be of a highly private nature, for the most part. One might think that a president would be just as dependent on the dean of students, but actually it would be easier in most cases for an institution to recover from a drug raid or a demonstration than it would be to recover from severe mismanagement of funds.

Phoney Consultation

Another intriguing dimension of the consultation problem involves the consultation which has no purpose -- at least, the president holds it for reasons other than getting good advice. Often, the "consultation" is for the purpose of rationalizing or getting support for a decision which has already been made. There are also many examples of pro forma meetings with department chairmen or other faculty leaders when it is clear all around that no ideas are expected. When an idea does come up, the response may be: "(This college) is a beautiful place and nothing is wrong with it. Thank you for your interest." Thus one learns that although the situation seems to ask for consultation, none is desired: "We get 'democracy' until it is running out our ears, but I'm not sure it's really the way things are run here." In some cases, going through the motions of consultation may be worse in terms of faculty morale than having none at all.

Of course, a phoney consultation can result when the faculty do not feel that they can give the president the best information possible: "President met with the ... faculty, asked for their complaints, reactions, etc. The faculty could not be candid because it was just before salary and promotions were to be fixed." Consultation is also used on occasion to bottle up ideas: "The tactic

used against potentially controversial enthusiasm is very effective. As soon as something gets off the ground it is required to be crustallized into an approved structure . By the time this is done it will have lost its steam." Some presidents seem to use this device in their consultation, knowing that the structure will be like a lead sinker tied to the idea, yet it all appears to be done in the name of democratic process. Faculty, of course, have also been known to refer a dangerous idea to a committee in order to "get a broader view of the opinions of their colleagues," knowing they will never see the idea again. It is thus possible to bury Caesar and praise him simultaneously.

An interesting subcategory of the phoney consultation is what might be termed the "chicken" consultation, the chief purpose of which is to get other people involved in a risky decision in order that blame may later be spread over a wider distance. References to this type of consultation are understandably vague, and it is difficult to know how widespread the practice is.

Double-Barrel Consultation

There is often a fear that the consultation may have different goals than the stated one. This often involves getting the consultant to work out a program and lead it rather than just giving his views, getting the consultant to agree with the decision the leader has already made, getting the consultant to "share the rap" if the leader's decision fails, using the consultant to disseminate information to groups the leader cannot reach, using the consultant to try to sway others to the decision which has already been made, etc. The problem Machiavelli discussed so well regarding the necessity of absolute truthfulness from consultants, is still with us.[4] Even with the best of motives, some presidents find that the offer of consulting is viewed with some suspicion. There seems to be no clear answer to this problem, but one procedure usually followed by presidents who use consultation successfully is to state as precisely as possible what the consultation is for, and whether or not the

consultant's views will be kept confidential. (Nothing is more devastating than to have the consultant assume that he is speaking confidentially, then to find his remarks quoted by the president the next day, with source mentioned.)

Appearances and Realities

One of the major conflicts in presidential role involves the "presentation of self" on campus as the leader when increasingly, the decision-making process is moving out of his hands and into state boards of trustees, private boards in private institutions, faculty senates, etc. Most presidents seem to want to maintain total accountability for the institution even though they no longer make all the major decisions. (Parenthetically, there are some institutions in our sample in which the president still plays the role of "absolute but not arbitrary king." However, the trend seems to be away from this pattern.)* In state institutions, the president may be asked to make a decision on a point, consult several different state agencies, then announce his "decision." This necessity of consulting with external agencies who are not always known to the on-campus personnel except as vague names or titles is bound to make the on-campus groups less interested in participation in governance. Thus it may be best for campus morale for the president to appear as the decision-maker, even though the rule book actually decided the issue.

Conclusion -- Is Trust Obsolete?

In this paper, some of the coping styles of presidents have been presented, within and across institutions. Our thesis has been that to understand presidential roles, we must look at the interaction of the president as person with the package of expectations and history which forms the "press" of the institution. If the role of the president is to maximize the energy available to accomplish the institution's goals (avoiding the nasty question of whether or not institutions

* Carnegie Institutions in Transition Project, directed by the author.

like colleges can <u>have</u> goals), then there is no ideal presidential style which will make any man a success in any presidency. But it is clear that successful presidents have found the levers of the organization, and can push them in such a way that others become involved.

From reading through the interview data, it seems clear to this writer that there is exceedingly little trust in operation in college and university governance. No system, no matter how neatly arranged, can operate without trust -- without it, the basic building blocks of governance -- representationality, delegation and consultation, and all the aspects of the social contract between the individual and the institution, become null and void. Even if a skillful president is able to increase the trust level within his campus, how does he work to promote trust in the state educational authorities which may be hundreds of miles away? How can he convey to the students and the trustees and the faculty that they are all involved in the same institution, seen from different perspectives? Only a consummate teacher could accomplish this task. The alternative seems to be to accept factionalism, to assume that without trust we will have to develop the enormously complex codification of procedures characteristic of work rules provisions, with the exact number of minutes per coffee break spelled out, and of faculty handbooks which are written as a buttressing of faculty prerogative against any and all "interference." But one can never cover <u>all</u> contingencies. The time seems to be right for a radical redefinition of governance, based perhaps less on decision-making, systems analysis, and task orientations, and more on the <u>quality of participation</u> which is provided. Such a redefinition is long overdue.

FOOTNOTES

1. I would like to state a pleasant indebtedness to Paul Ward, Executive Secretary of the American Historical Association, for stimulating my thoughts in the area of presidential consultation with his stimulating paper, "On the King's Taking Counsel." Also, for certain organizational suggestions, to Morris Keeton and Stephen Plumer, my colleagues on the Campus Governance Project, although the analysis is the work of the author.

2. A statistical analysis of the interview data was contemplated and rejected, for some of the reasons suggested by Kenneth Boulding;

   > "Now, alas, only the IBM machine gets thoroughly familiar with his data; the investigator does not. His data are served up to him in a variety of digested forms, and he surveys a product which is as far removed from the data as the data from the situation."

   "Evidence for an Administrative Science," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June, 1958), p. 17.

3. John Dale Russell, The Finance of Higher Education, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954 (rev. ed.) p. 14.

4. "But a prince who consults with more than one advisor, unless he be a wise man, will never know how to coordinate the advice given him. For each of his advisors will see the matter from his own point of view, and a stupid prince will be unable to make allowances and distinctions. Advisors are of necessity of such a nature because unless men are compelled to be good they will invariably turn out to be bad." (Crofts edition, pp. 70-71.)